



# Urban Forestry Commission

**DATE:** 25 April 2022

**TO:** Mayor Tarter and City Council Members

**FROM:** Amy Crumpton, Chair, Urban Forestry Commission

**SUBJECT:** Urban Forestry Commission Requests to City Budget FY2023 and Requested Text Changes to Arborist & Urban Forestry Section of the FY2023 Proposed Budget (pp. 168-170)

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The UFC requests that the City make accommodations in the FY2023 Budget to fund the following two needs that currently are listed as Priorities for Future Funding. Funding these priorities in FY2023, rather than putting them off for future, will enable the Arborist to address daily requirements and urban forestry best management practices in caring for the City's urban forest and public landscaped open spaces:

**1) Maintenance Worker (1.00 FTE) 70,000.**

This position is the number one priority for the Arborist to restore the Urban Forestry Division to its full-strength pre-pandemic staff of 5.00 FTEs. This will allow for improved customer service, less contracted work, and the ability of Urban Forestry to meet tree planting goals, continue habitat restoration, and systematically remove invasive plant species.

A full Urban Forestry staff is necessary to overcome a backlog of street tree care tasks and manage 18 City parks, six City Facilities, and 22 landscaped areas along City streets. In the last few years, the City's public landscapes have expanded by at least three acres - i.e., Fellows Property, new trees in multi-modal project and on S. Washington, and new rain gardens. Going forward, the proposed FY2023 budget aims to cut Professional and Contractual funds under the Arborist & Urban Forestry by 15.6%. Thus, sustaining funds will not be available to hire contractors to help the City care for its rain gardens. It will be up to in-house staff to perform the maintenance work on these green infrastructure investments. The persistence and increasing number of invasive plant species poses a labor-intensive challenge in managing rain gardens as well as City parks.

*[Note: A previous request asked to reinstate a Senior Urban Forester position (\$90,000 plus benefits). That position will be posted in lieu of an Urban Forestry Crew Leader to speed securing a professional staff member to assist the Arborist with time sensitive administrative responsibilities and allow the Arborist to delegate authority when taking leave or in case of emergency.]*

## **2) Update of City's Tree Inventory - \$100,000**

As a best practice, the City's tree inventory should undergo a review and update every five years. The City's tree inventory data is now more than 10 years old. A Tree Inventory Consultant would update inventory data on all trees on City property. An updated inventory is essential to the Arborist to provide more accurate annual and periodical reports and commercial plan review, site plan enforcement, maintenance tracking and reporting, and volunteer planting locations.

In the UFC 2021 Annual Report to the City, we asked that the FY2023 budget include funds for a **100 Trees a Year Program** (\$25,000 - \$35,000) to purchase trees for the Neighborhood Tree Program that moves beyond sporadic, although welcome, funds from Voluntary Concessions to the Stormwater Utility Fund. This fund would cover costs of trees and installation labor and give the Arborist flexibility to use in-house Urban Forestry crew or contractors when necessary. The UFC sets this request aside for the moment in favor of the two priority requests above. However, it must be noted that the 9.5% reduction in Materials, Supplies, and Other for the Arborist & Urban Forestry proposed FY2023 budget likely will have impact on the ability of the City to purchase trees. Materials and supplies costs are increasing such that, for example, in Fall 2021, the costs of many tree species purchased for the Neighborhood Tree Program increased between 40% - 60% from earlier Spring NTP purchase prices.

Finally, the UFC submits suggested edits to the Arborist & Urban Forestry section (pp. 168-170) of the proposed FY2023 budget. The text changes attached, particularly within the Trends and Issues section, more fully express the needs and challenges that the Arborist & Urban Forestry are facing.

**Attachment:** Requested Text Changes to Arborist & Urban Forestry Section of the FY2023 Proposed Budget (pp. 168-170)

**Attachment: UFC Requested Text Changes to Arborist & Urban Forestry Section of the FY2023 Proposed Budget (pp. 168-169)**

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**ARBORIST & URBAN FORESTRY**

**SUMMARY OF SERVICES PROVIDED**

The City Arborist is responsible for the City's substantial inventory of trees **and oversees management of public landscapes as natural resources that support the City's urban forest.** The City is proud to be the longest recognized Tree City USA in the State of Virginia, having been awarded the designation every year since 1979. Specific responsibilities include:

- Maintenance
  - o Planting, pruning, care, and removal ~~approximately 7,000~~ (when necessary) of **over 11,000** trees along City streets, ~~thousands more in Parks,~~ and other City properties
  - o ~~Maintenance~~ **Maintaining** trees **and vegetation** in 18 City parks and 6 City facilities
- Administrative support and management of the following programs:
  - o Tree City USA
  - o Neighborhood Tree Program
  - o Habitat Restoration Program (removal of invasive and restoration of native plants)
- Enforcement and management of Chapter 44 (Vegetation) and Chapter 48 (Zoning) of the City Code
- Review and inspection of development activity (residential, commercial, and public)
- Administration and liaison for the Tree **Urban Forestry** Commission
- Public outreach and support for the City's Arbor Day celebration
- Maintenance
  - o Planting, pruning, care, for vegetation along City streets thousands more in Parks and other City properties
  - o Mowing, mulching, and landscape maintenance of 18 City parks and gardens and six City facilities
  - o Commercial Streetscape installations along West Broad, South Maple, and North & South Washington Streets, and 22 landscaped areas along other City streets
  - o Ten Rain Garden/Bioretenention facilities (~~partially funded by Stormwater Fund~~)
  - o 19 irrigation systems

**TRENDS AND ISSUES**

- Continued commercial development, city park enhancements (~~West End Park and Howard Herman Stream Valley Park~~), and new facilities have introduced new maintenance responsibilities. The elimination of a position hinders **fulfilling required obligations for the expanded workload.** ~~taking on new responsibilities~~
- Nearly ~~one~~ **three** acres of new streetscape, rain gardens, and City maintained greenspace has been installed in the last decade
- Some larger Site Plan installations have indicated a willingness or desire to privately maintain streetscape enhancements associated with the development

- The **Arborist** City has developed a tree management database, which allows for proactive management of ~~our~~ **the City's** tree infrastructure
- Increasing severe weather from storms and drought cause damage and loss of trees on public property and clean-up costs for a single event can drain yearly maintenance funds.
- Invasive plant growth within the City is difficult to contain without constant year-round intervention from professionals and volunteers.
- Costs of contractors, materials and supplies continue to increase. Between Spring and Fall 2021, costs of many tree species purchased for the NTP increased between 40%-60%.
- ~~· Continued commercial development, city park enhancements (West End Park and Howard Herman Stream Valley Park), and new Rain Garden/Bioretention facilities have introduced new maintenance responsibilities~~
- ~~· Some larger Site Plan installations have indicated a willingness or desire to privately maintain streetscape enhancements associated with the development~~

## **SIGNIFICANT CHANGES**

- Combining of the Arborist and Urban Forestry divisions within DPW
- The Crew Leader position has been vacated in favor of the Urban Forester position
- Reduction in new tree budget to accommodate contract increase of 5% throughout the department

## **DELIVERABLES**

- Provide services to identify and **manage** ~~maintain~~ the **11,000+** ~~7000+~~ trees within the City.
- Work with the Urban Forestry Crew and on-call contractor to install and maintain City infrastructure.
- Monthly servicing of the commercial streetscape installations (landscape maintenance, litter removal, etc.)

## **PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE FUNDING**

1. Maintenance Worker (1.00 FTE) 70,000. This position will restore the Arborist and Urban Forestry Division to its full strength of 5.00 FTEs. This will allow for improved customer service, less contracted work, and an expansion of programs such as tree plantings, habitat restoration, and removal of invasive species.

2. Update of City tree inventory \$100,000. This update needs to be done every 3-5 years and will provide for an equitable and balanced tree installation plan. In addition to a high-level overview to determine equitable tree placement, staff will also be able to group trees and areas to get the best price possible for tree installation.

## **PERMANENT POSITIONS – 4.00 TOTAL FTE**

- 1.00 Arborist
- 1.00 Urban Forester
- 2.00 Maintenance Workers